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ZIGZAGS IN SOVIET CULTURAL POLICY

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ZIGZAGS IN SOVIET CULTURAL POLICY

In marked contrast to its crackdown on the liberals in March, the Soviet regime has recently reverted to a public posture of relative neutrality between conserative and liberal cultural groups. Nonconformity has been muffled for the time being, and campaigning for orthodoxy in the arts is being left, in the main, to the hard-core conservatives. The regime seems to have settled for a few ambiguously phrased recantations extracted from young writers and artists and for the recent silence of the older ones. There is little evidence, however, that this is more than a temporary truce in the liberal intelligentsia's struggle since 1953 against regime controls. Still scheduled for 18 June is a party central committee plenum on "ideology."

Guilt for Crimes Under Stalin

The latest cultural storm stemmed from Khrushchev's decision last fall to permit further literary exposés of the suffering under Stalin. In mid-October 1962 he reportedly told a group of writers that de-Stalinization (which he did not define) was not a short-term campaign but a policy. The anniversary of the removal of Stalin's body from the mausoleum in Red Square on 21 October was marked by Pravda's publication of Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem, "Stalin's Heirs," and was followed by a wave of anti-Stalin literature. As a result, art, sculpture, and music were quickly infused with a sense of increased freedom of creativity and long-hidden experimental works were brought out for public discussion.

More than artistic experiment was involved, however. For many Soviet intellectuals, the question of guilt for the crimes committed under Stalin has not been solved by the party's bland explanations--in 1953 that it was all Beria, in 1956 that it was all Beria and Stalin, and in 1961 that it was Beria, Stalin, and their "accomplices," Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich. Official insistence that no one knew what was going on until the "truth" was "revealed" in 1956 has constituted a special sticking point. The older intellectuals remember. Moreover, some of the "rehabilitated" have survived to return to a society where their old persecutors are still in positions of authority.

Aleksey Romanov now holds a string of party and state titles, including first deputy chairman of the Central Committee's Ideological Department,

which is responsible for conformity among intellectuals. During World War II, however, he was the secret police officer responsible for the arrest and imprisonment of a schoolteacher turned soldier, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Twenty years later, the "rehabilitated" Solzhenitsyn returned to Moscow as the author of the account of prison camp life, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, published last fall, reportedly with Khrushchev's personal approval. Presumably Solzhenitsyn will some day face Romanov.

Soviet intellectuals have identified the most vocal cultural conservatives--Vsevelod Kochetov, Anatoly Sofronov, and Nikolay Gribachev--as among the initiators of the 1948 anti-Semitic campaign against "cosmopolitanism." Literary critic Aleksandr Borshchagovsky, who was arrested in 1948 as a "homeless cosmopolitan," has returned to Moscow as one of the staunchest supporters of the young liberals, confronting his old accusers whenever writers meet professionally.

Many of the younger writers and artists are or claim to be children of Stalin's victims--the "unjustly repressed"--with bitter memories of murdered parents and ruined childhoods. Their ambivalent attitude toward the older generation was expressed by novelist Vasily Aksenov last November: "It is true that we feel the need for some sort of accounting with our elders: how could they allow 1937 to happen! Many of them allowed their holy causes and slogans to be used for unworthy purposes. But this is not our only attitude toward our elders. There is also the fact that they were the martyrs of the cult of personality. In our eyes this provides them with a sort of halo."

The guilt of Stalin's assistants, in lowly positions as well as high, is an emotion-charged issue. According to reports in early 1962, liberals in the Writers Union were determined to punish some 40 to 50 of their colleagues for having used police oppression to further their own careers during Stalin's purges of the intellectuals. Three conservatives, Yakov Yelsburg, Nikolay Lesyuchevsky, and Vladimir Yermilov, reportedly headed the list. The regime refused to countenance anything so widespread, but did release Yelsburg's dossier to a Writers Union commission for investigation. On 27 November an obscure Moscow literary paper carried the news of Yelsburg's expulsion from the Writers Union for having acted as a volunteer provocateur and informer during the purges.

A Winter of Struggle

The first storm warning for the liberals came on 1 December, when Khrushchev was introduced to Soviet experimental painting and sculpture. There were widespread rumors among Moscow intellectuals that

his visit to an exhibition of works by young artists had been engineered by the conservatives, who saw their authority being undermined or who feared a fate similar to Yelsburg's. If so, they must have been well satisfied by his explosion of surprise and disapproval.

Two formal meetings of regime spokesmen with the intellectuals followed, one on 17 December and one from 24 to 26 December. Leonid Ilichev, as chairman of the Ideological Commission, attacked stylistic experimentation in art, music, and literature as alien to socialism. He reaffirmed the principles of socialist realism and party-mindedness and warned against debilitating "humanism."

Neither meeting brought the intellectuals into line, however. Their mood was expressed by film director Mikhail Romm's remark that he saw no need to remain silent in the face of attacks from the same people who had inspired the 1948 "anticosmopolitanism" campaign: "We reason thus--after all, now they do not arrest anyone. It is quite clear. No one will be imprisoned, nor forbidden to work, nor driven out of Moscow and deprived of an income." Citing Khrushchev's 1959 advice to the writers to settle their quarrels among themselves, he urged: "So let us look into what is going on. We have kept silent long enough."

The liberals counterattacked--this time from within the party itself. On 18 December the party organ of the Moscow branch of the Writers Union held its annual election; not a single conservative was elected to the new bureau. Reportedly the bureau's first act was to petition the party central committee for the removal of the second on the liberals' list of Stalin's informers--Nikolay Lesyuchevsky--from his job as head of a publishing house.

No further information is available on the Lesyuchevsky case nor was the story ever carried in the Soviet press. The battle against Stalin's informers crept into the press, however, in late January and early February, when Izvestia published a sharp exchange between Ilya Ehrenburg and Vladimir Yermilov, the third conservative target of the liberals. In his memoirs Ehrenburg had said that he, and by implication others, had known of the injustices in the mass arrests of the thirties but had "gritted his teeth in silence"; not only was protest futile but in the long run the country was still on the right road to communism.

Yermilov, who had not chosen silence but active participation in the purges, charged Ehrenburg with cowardice in not protesting and with claiming knowledge after the fact, since the "truth" was not known to anyone until 1956. In an accompanying editorial note, Izvestia gave lukewarm support to Yermilov but carried the

letters of both men, suggesting that it lacked authoritative guidance on this very delicate issue.

The following day Izvestia ran an unusual "human interest" story of Khrushchev's exploits in World War II in which Khrushchev was credited with having rescued an honest Soviet colonel from the attempts of Beria's agents to "frame" him on charges of sabotage. There was no reference in the Khrushchev story to the Ehrenburg-Yermilov argument which had immediately preceded it. The promptness with which it appeared, however, suggested a recognition at least on the part of Izvestia's editorial board that party leaders who made their careers under Stalin are now vulnerable to charges of complicity in his crimes.

Fiction published during the fall and winter reflected the intelligentsia's concern with the crimes of the Stalin years. To stories of suffering in "overhasty" collectivization campaigns, and heroic soldiers returning from the war only to be charged with treason, there began to be added a veiled question--why were these things allowed to happen? Other writers depicted "father and son" problems--a father who had deserted his son because the mother had been falsely arrested, a son unable to communicate with his party-minded father because for the youth the party program was "nichevo"--nothing.

In Yevtushenko's autobiography, published for the first time in France in February and March, he quoted a discussion with a group of students: "Suddenly an 18-year-old girl cried out in the weary voice of a 60-year-old woman: 'The revolution is dead!' But another young poet answered her: 'The revolution is not dead! It is ill, and we (poets) must help bring it back to health!'"

Khrushchev Cracks Down

On 8 March an angry Khrushchev again confronted the assembled intellectuals. He reiterated defensively that no one in the leadership had known during Stalin's lifetime that the mass "repressions" were directed against innocent people. He undercut this picture of ignorance, however, by his praise of novelist Mikhail Sholokhov for having remonstrated (unsuccessfully) with Stalin as early as 1932 about the collectivization campaigns, and by his own claim that he had twice personally thwarted Stalin's plans for further purges. He insisted that Stalin's merits must be recognized, despite the latter's "errors" and "abuse of power entrusted to him," and for all practical purposes called a halt to literary presentations of popular suffering under Stalin. Khrushchev denounced modern elements in art, music, literature, and architecture and bluntly warned that the party would insist on conformity from all intellectuals.

A series of regional meetings "on ideology" chaired by high-ranking party spokesmen directed attacks against both the nationally known cultural

liberals in Moscow and Leningrad and local intelligentsia who had copied their "errors." The USSR and RSFSR Writers Union plenums in late March and early April also provided platforms for attacks on the nonconformists and for specific demands for recantations. The chief targets were Ehrenburg and Viktor Nekrasov among the older generation and Yevtushenko, Aksenov, and poet Andrey Voznesensky among the "sons." Their "spiritual fathers"--senior writers and chief editors who had encouraged them--were also heavily criticized. Few critics were hardy enough, however, to raise explicitly the sensitive central issue of complicity in the crimes of the Stalin years, and attacks on Ehrenburg were generally confined to his taste for modern art. Scattered attacks were also launched against several formerly stalwart conservatives who had joined the liberals.

In the course of these attacks it became evident that the extreme conservatives were attempting to make up in virulence what they lacked in numbers. The majority of the intellectuals who were not under attack remained aloof from the storm; a few conventional and respected artists and writers defended the victims, and several warned publicly against a return to "the methods of the cult of personality."

Under heavy pressure, several of the younger "culprits," including Aksenov, Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, and sculpter Ernst Neizvestny, finally produced ambiguously worded "apologies." Neizvestny promised to work "more and better" in the future. Ehrenburg and the other "spiritual fathers" apparently refused to respond at all. Nekrasov publicly defended his own actions as those of a "true Communist."

Despite their recalcitrance, no major public actions were taken against them. Aleksandr Tvardovsky remains chief editor of the liberals' stronghold, Novy Mir; Yevtushenko and Aksenov are still on the editorial board of the magazine Yunost! The moderate head of the Moscow writers was replaced by a conservative, but the other liberals elected to the board in the spring of 1962, including Yevtushenko and Voznesensky, have not been removed. There has been no announcement of any change in the membership of the party bureau, captured by the liberals last December. Aksenov has apparently been sent off to visit construction sites in Siberia and Voznesensky to inspect factories near Moscow--both "trips" are undoubtedly inconvenient, but can scarcely be expected to break two angry young men. This is also true of the cancellation of projected trips abroad for several of the nonconformists.

A Milder Cultural Climate

In late April the public storm began to abate; criticism was transferred out of the general press to literary and artistic newspapers and journals. Three unorthodox writers who had been confined in insane asylums earlier this year reportedly were released. On

12 May Pravda published an interview by American correspondent Henry Shapiro with liberal Aleksandr Tvardovsky. In his first public statement since the crackdown, Tvardovsky paid lip service to conformity but made no reference to his earlier "errors" as chief editor of Novy Mir. In outlining his plans for the future, he showed every intention of continuing to encourage unorthodox literature, promising his readers works by several writers who had been most harshly attacked. On 19 May both Pravda and Izvestia published notably moderate articles on literature, confirming the milder cultural climate.

Several factors may have contributed to this change. On 17 April the Italian Communist Party, deeply engaged in the Italian election campaign, publicly dissociated itself from the hard cultural line in the USSR. Western press criticism and the publicly expressed fears inside the USSR lest there be a return to Stalinist methods may have further inhibited the regime, already limited in the weapons it could bring to bear against the recalcitrants by concern about a public image of respectability. The hospitalization of party secretary Frol Kozlov in April removed from policy-making circles the man who reportedly had been the extreme conservatives' staunch protector, in contrast to Khrushchev who had on occasion lent a sympathetic ear to the liberals. Finally there have been continuing hints of widespread although muted public support for the liberals. Readings of nonconformists' poetry and exhibitions of modern art continue to be held quietly, and the attacks served to focus public interest on these "undesirable" works.

Plenum on Ideology

With the quieting of the cultural storm there has been evidence in the press of a further change in plans for the next central committee plenum. A plenum reportedly had been scheduled for late March or early April to discuss problems in the chemical industry. With the March crackdown in culture, however, the subject was changed to "ideology" and the plenum was postponed until 28 May. Then, following the announcement of Kozlov's illness, it was again postponed, this time to 18 June.

During the disturbance over culture there had first been rumors and then press discussions of organizational measures to tighten and centralize controls over art and literature. Soviet intellectuals expected details of the reorganization to be announced at the plenum, which was also expected to provide a platform for recantations by the leading nonconformists.

As the violent criticism abated, however, discussions of organizational changes

and recantations ceased. Ilichev is still scheduled to report on "Current Tasks in the Party's Ideological Work," but "ideology" is no longer being cited in connection with the recalcitrant intellectuals. Press discussions instead have turned to the education of young Communists of tomorrow, who are to be taught "honesty, modesty, a sense of duty, tactful behavior toward comrades, old people, and especially women," and generally "cultured" behavior. The same considerations which led the regime to moderate its cultural crackdown may also have contributed to a change in the context in which "ideology" is to be discussed. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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